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ABSTRACT

The keeping of a dream log can spark the imagination in freshman composition courses, giving students opportunities to be both creative artists and critics. With the emphasis more on using dreams than on interpreting them, students are free to explore the symbols and relevance of their dreams when creating written or musical compositions, films, paintings, sculptures, or photographic displays. Four major methods of interpretation--Freudian, Jungian, mystical or prophetic, and Gestalt--supply reference sources, while fiction, musical compositions, and various slides of art and photography provide examples of dream inspired creations. (JM)

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DREAM LOGS:: DREAMS AS A CREATIVE FORCE IN FRESHMAN COMPOSITION AND THE ARTS

Even reluctant writers dream. And they are interested enough in themselves to record their dreams in a log and seek interpretation. When I first suggested a dream log, some students protested. They did not remember their dreams. But, after a few weeks of discussion on the use of dreams in literature, music, and art, every member of the class began recalling something. They also became aware of the problem solving aspects of dreams.

If we turn first to a non-verbal area, music, we can find some excellent illustrations of problem solving through dreams. Richard Wagner was in search of a beginning and Giuseppe Tartini was in search of an ending.

Here is what Wagner, in his autobiography, writes about his discovery of the orchestral overture of Das Reingold.

> After a night spent in fever and sleeplessness, I forced myself to take a long tramp the next day through the hilly country, covered with pine woods. It all looked dreary and desolate.... Returning in the afternoon, I stretched myself, dead tired, on a hard couch, awaiting the long-desired hour of sleep.... I fell into a kind of somnolent state, in which I suddenly felt as though I were sinking in swiftly flowing water. The rushing sound formed itself in my brain into a musical sound, the chord of E flat mayor, which continually re-echoed in broken forms; these broken chords seemed to be melodic passages of increasing motion, yet the pure triad of E flat major never changed, but seemed by its continuance to impart infinite significance to the element in which I was sinking. I awoke in sudden terror from my doze, feeling as though the waves were rushing high above my head. I at once recognized that the orchestral overture to the Rheingold, which must have lain latent within me, though it had been unable to find definite form, had at last been revealed to me.

Note the sustained E flat on the bass fiddles, then the B flat on the violins, and then the G flat on the French horns added to complete the triad up and down. Then extra horns are added; then cellos. The horns still do the same tempo but the strings do it twice as fast. Then the flutes play the highest register of the orchestra.

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CS 201 283

Giuseppe Tartini lacked an ending to a violin sonata until he dreamed the following:

> I dreamed one night that I made a pact with the devil. In return for my soul, the devil promised to be at my side whenever I needed him, anticipating my every wish. On a whim, I handed him my violin, to see what kind of musician he might be. To my astonishment, the music he made was exquisite - a sonata of such unearthly skill and beauty that I stood transfixed as he played. My pulse stopped, breath failed me - and I awoke. Snatching up a fiddle, I tried to recapture the sounds I'd heard. Feverishly, before I should forget, I noted down the music of a sonata. But though it's the best I ever composed, how poor, how far inferior it is to the music the fevil played in my tantalizing dream!

He named the work "The Devil's Trill."

From this spirited ending, full of harmonics, thirds and sixths, you can understand why violinists have called it diabolical because they had "a devil of a time" trilling it!

The dream log gives the student an opportunity to be both a creative artist and a critic. As a creative artist, he/she or his unconscious creates a scenario, casts the characters, complicates the action, focuses on details of his own preference to heighten mood, dramatizes emotions often in code and ends the drama where he wishes. He need only write in his log what has "played"on his dream screen. The order of writing it will be chronological. Then the critic takes over. He will try to interpret the dream in logical order. He will associate to the symbols, explicate key phrases, and grasp the relevance of the dream to himself. My major emphasis is less on interpreting dreams and more on using them - verbally or non-verbally.

The sheets I've sent around list some of our sources. We studied four major methods of interpretation: Freudian, Jungian, mystical or prophetic, and Gestalt. The dreams that excited the students the most, besides their own, were Abraham Lincoln's prophetic dreams and the dreams of ordinary Germans during the rise of Nazism, recounted in Charlotte Beradt's The Third Reich of Dreams.

Fifteen years before Orwell's 1984, Germans were dreaming of talking stoves, clocks, and pillows revealing their family's criticism of Hitler; of police arresting people for their thoughts; of women who were staunchly anti-Nazi being propositioned by Hitler or Goering and feeling thrilled!

Now for the slides.

This bas-relief of a Greek girl became the logos for psychoanalysts. It became fashionable to hang a copy of it on their office walls. All because a Dane, Wilhelm Jensen, wrote a novel, Gradiva, which Freud analyzed in a book entitled, Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's Gradiva. Jensen's story if of a young archaeologist who falls in love with a bas-relief of a Grecian girl with a particularly striking gait. NOTE HER FEET. His fantasies about her assume a delusional form and he becomes convinced she perished in the eruption that overwhelmed Pompeii in 79 A.D. He is drawn there and finds the girl, who may be a spirit or a living maiden. She recognizes his mental state and successfully cures him with the inevitable happy result. She then turns out to be a childhood playmate whom the youth had completely forgotten, but who still lived in the same town as himself. Freud praised Jensen's understanding of the psychological processes at work. The ancient time of two thousand years ago when the pair were supposed to have know and loved each other is equated with the forgotten period of their actual childhood. The repression that blotted this out corresponds with the interment of Pompeii under ashes, but in neither case is there destruction, only burial.

Freud wrote Jensen to connect the motives he had unravelled. He hypothesized that the source of Jensen's inspiration was a little girl, possibly a sister whom he must have loved but who disappointed him by dying. Presumably the other child had some physical disability such as a club foot which he converted into a beautiful gait. It was the sight of this on the relief that suggested the idea. Jensen answered that he had no sister but

1. Frontispiece to The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. James Strachey, London, The Hogarth Press, 1959, Vol. IX (1906-1908) Jensen's Gradiva and Other Works.

a first love, a little girl with whom he had grown up together, who died of tuberculosis at eighteen. Freud had seen the relief in the Vatican; Jensen wrote that he'd only seen a plaster cast in the Munich Museum. He also said he got the idea for the story while working on something else and that it was written in an uninterrupted flow - much as Robert Frost wrote "Stopping in the Woods On a Snowy Evening" at dawn after working all night on something else that never jelled.

Other slides shown: Goya's "Dream of Reason Produces Monters"
Fuseli's "The Nightmare"
Chagall's "Over the Town"
Kekule's dream of bezine formula as a snake
Photos by Mike Bushelle (from Norman McKenzie's Dreams and Dreaming) depicting common dreams of flying, missing trains, appearing half-dressed, and the opening page of Doris Lessing's Notes from a Golden Notebook.
My students' dream depicted in collages, drawings, and sculpture: Denise's collage of bananas she could not bury in her dream; Neil's pastel of three flying women aliens over a picnic table; Stephan's sculpture of refusing to pay $5.29 to see Warhol's film Trash"; Susan's oil of turning into a tomato plant.

I wish I could show the interesting dreams my students have depicted in stories, poems, films, sculpture, music, and photographs.

Even if a student does not fully understand his dream, he respects the fact that dreams are concerned with unfinished emotional business. The particular are of conflict - and who in a crisis stage of growth does not have conflict? - is on a slow fuse. This may later become the subject of a dream.

In sharing their dreams, my freshmen discovered one common working out of problems of separation from home and family, fear and wish for independence and creativity as artists and above all search for identity as men and women, geniuses and worker drones, radicals and conservative, citizens and private beings.

The flexibility they developed in dream interpretation eliminated their usual concern over giving the "right" interpetation - which in its most pejorative sense means the rigid biased interpetation of the teacher. We all gained further insight into ourselves and the arts. I plan to use the dream log again and again.

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Dostoevsky, "Dream of a Ridiculous Man"

Fowles, "The Magus"

Kafka, "The Country Doctor"

Lawrence, "The Fox"

Malamud, "Angel Levine" "Naked Nude"

Oates, "Them"

Porter, Katherine Anne "Pale Horse, Pale Rider"
"Jilting of Granny Wetherall"

Pinter, "The Lover"